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OBSERVATIONS

S. Wesley Ariarajah

1988 has been the year in which the World Council of Churches celebrated the 40th Anniversary of its founding and its first Assembly in Amsterdam. Many celebrations have been held during the year to mark this historical moment. These celebrations have helped us to look back at our history and to examine the kind of contribution the Council has made to the ecumenical movement. It seems that there was cause for joy, for the fragile boat - the symbol of the WCC - has indeed followed its course through the storms and the turbulent waters of the four eventful decades. By and large it has moved in the direction set for it by its pioneers, that is, in the search for the unity of the Church and the whole of humankind, and to be at the service of all peoples in their quest for a just, peaceful and more humane society.

It is significant that the programme on 'Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation' (JPIC), had its visible moments during this 40th Anniversary, for it in many ways sums up the immediate thrusts of all our programmes towards unity. The Dialogue sub-unit was able to make two substantial contributions to the discussion on JPIC - one through a multi-faith input into the major conference held in Norway, on the 'Integrity of Creation', and the other through the 'Buddhist-Christian Dialogue' held in Seoul, on questions of Justice and Peace. Brief statements from these meetings are included in this issue.

For the Dialogue sub-unit the most significant year during the past 40 years was, of course, 1971 when the Central Committee set up a new sub-

unit on Dialogue to follow more vigorously the question of Christian relations to people of other faiths, which until then had been lodged with the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) through their study called "Word of God and Men (sic) of Other Faiths".

When the WCC Assembly meets in Canberra, Australia, in 1991 the Dialogue sub-unit will have completed 20 years of its history. At the forthcoming Dialogue Working Group meeting in June 1989 in Morocco, we hope to undertake a thorough evaluation of the sub-unit's workstyle and the way in which it has related to other religious communities over the years since its inception. We hope that this will help us to set directions and priorities for its work beyond the Assembly.

Such an evaluation of where we are in our theological understanding as churches in our relationship to the Jewish people and to Judaism, was attempted at the last meeting of the Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People (CCJP) held in Sigtuna, Sweden. We are pleased to publish the CCJP statement in this issue of Current Dialogue.

As we look towards the next Assembly, four major events stand out in the life of the sub-unit. The first will be when we attempt to make an interim assessment of the study "My Neighbours Faith - And Mine". This will take place in June 1989 in conjunction with the meeting of the Dialogue Working Group. Although the Study Guide is available in 16 languages and has been widely used, many groups have not yet sent in their reports to the sub-unit.

All who want to be part of this interim evaluation and would like to make an input to this meeting, should let us have their reports within the next few months. We hope to publish the findings of this meeting in Current Dialogue in order to promote the formation of more groups within the churches.

The second major event will be a Theology of Religions meeting projected for January 1990, in the hope of assessing where we are in our theological understanding of other faiths as we move towards the 7th Assembly. Those of you who follow WCC Assembly discussions will know that the Theology of Religions has been a controversial issue in the past two Assemblies in Nairobi ('75) and Vancouver ('83). It will be no less controversial in Canberra. It is our hope, however, that some clarification of issues will take place at the forthcoming WCC World Conference on Mission being organized by the CWME. The Dialogue sub-unit will make its contribution to this meeting through the participation of 12 consultants from other faiths who would take an active part in the discussions.

The other two major events have a more immediate relationship to the Assembly for they would constitute a multi-faith and a multi-cultural dialogue, intended to give input into Assembly discussions from the perspective of other religious and cultural traditions.

1988 has also been a difficult year for the sub-unit on Dialogue, for it has seen the departure of two of its colleagues who served it well. Rev. Allan Brockway, who had responsibility for Jewish Relations and our work with New Religious Movements, left the Council after completing nine years of service. He was also the editor of Current Dialogue and secretary of the Consultation on the Church and the

Jewish People. Allan has now returned to the U.S.A.

Dr. Stuart Brown was to have left the services of the Council after the 7th Assembly in 1991. In the meantime, however, he decided to accept the invitation to serve as General Secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches in Toronto. We are in the process of completing the search for his successor to fill the desk on Christian-Muslim relations, and our work on Traditional Religions, which Stuart did so ably and so well.

I am sure the readers of Current Dialogue will join me as we express our gratitude to these two colleagues for their commitment to dialogue and the valuable contribution they made during their ministry with the Dialogue sub-unit of the WCC. We are certain that their experience with the wider ecumenical family will enable them to make significant contributions to their current responsibilities.

Let us hope that the year 1989, at the beginning of which you will receive this issue of Current Dialogue, will help us to further intensify the search for a world of peace and justice, and one in which a 'culture of dialogue' will permeate all walks of life.

Every good wish for a year full of God's blessings.



Integrity of Creation An Ecumenical Discussion

The study on the integrity of creation is part of a much larger process. The Vancouver Assembly of the World Council of Churches invited all churches "to engage in a conciliar process of mutual commitment (covenant) to justice, peace and the integrity of creation". While the terms justice and peace are familiar, "the integrity of creation" is new. To be sure, it includes ecological and environmental issues, but goes beyond them. Its central thrust aims at a caring attitude towards nature - an emphasis that is evident in the German "Bewahrung der Schöpfung" and in the French "sauvegarde de la création". The English "the integrity of creation" says more. It tries to bring together the issues of justice, peace and the environment by stressing the fact that there is an integrity or unity that is given in God's creation.

An ecumenical consultation was held from 25 February to 3 March 1988 in Granvollen, Norway, to explore the meaning of the term the integrity of creation. There were about fifty participants from the Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant churches from all parts of the world. There were representatives from other faiths - Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh. There were also Christian Indigenous People. During the first three days there were presentations from various perspectives on the understanding of creation and the threats to creation. The following is an extract from the report, together with some reflections by a Buddhist, a Hindu and a Jew.

Perspectives from People of Other Faiths

As Christians we share the earth with persons of many different faiths, ideologies and cultures. We are part of a common human family. We recognize that many of the issues that concern us as Christians and as churches can be resolved only in partnership with persons of other faiths and convictions. The encounter with people of other faiths sharpens our awareness to other ways of understanding the relationship between humanity, nature and God. These can enrich our understanding and, at times, help us to reformulate our views. It is with this concern in mind that we listen to the significance of the integrity of creation from other faith perspectives.

We recognize the common scriptural and spiritual heritage we have with Jews and Muslims. We share with them our biblical vision of creation as belong-

ing to God, who created and ordered it. All these three traditions speak of the intrinsic value of creation, of the special relationship in which the whole created order stands before God, and of the special place of human beings as persons appointed by God to care for God's creation.

While recognizing a special place of human beings in creation, Judaism also emphasizes the fact that the special place accorded to human beings in the creation does not permit abuse or inappropriate "mastery" over the rest of creation. Jewish tradition has maintained time and again that Israel's vision of the non-human aspects of creation requires people to care for and serve other creatures (see, for example, Gen. 2:15). Care for the earth itself is reflected in the Sabbatical year and Jubilee laws. Scriptures even include laws for the

protection of trees, preventing them from being cut when besieging enemy cities (Deut. 20:19).

Jewish teaching firmly states that the whole of creation is God's. God is the primordial Creator, Sustainer, and is the One who renews creation. Indeed, certain texts from Jewish sacred writings (e.g. the creation Psalms) can help other peoples of faith to understand the Jewish teaching on the creation, and can serve as a basis for dialogue with the Jewish community about biblical visions of creation.

Islam also affirms that the whole creation is the working of God. The central concept of Islam is tawheed or the unity of God. Allah is unity, and His unity is also reflected in the unity of humankind and the unity of humanity and nature. Humankind's role on earth is that of a khalifa, vice-regent or trustee of God, who is accountable to God for the trusteeship granted by God. A wanton, careless and wasteful use of creation is sin against the Creator. An irreverent attitude to the creation, even in the slaying of an animal for food, is to militate against God's holy will.

Significantly Sikhism also emphasises the absolute dependence of creation on God. "For countless ages" says Guru Nanak, "there was utter misty darkness. There was neither day, nor night, no moon, no sun, but the Lord sat alone in a deep trance..." (AG. 1035). Then God created the universe of which humankind is a part. Human beings stand along with the rest of creation before God and depend on God for their being.

In the Buddha's teaching humanity functions in mutual interdependence with all creation. Human beings are intricately related to all sentient beings in a continuum of consciousness, but are special in that they are able

to exercise will. Because of this, every human being, regardless of race, class, or sex has the potential for spiritual awakening and should be encouraged and supported towards that end. A skillful relation with creation is instrumental to spiritual awakening. Thus, human beings should respect all creation and respond to it with "humble harmlessness" (ahimsa) and compassion. There is no "just" violence in Buddhism.

In relating to the earth it is important to obtain a "right livelihood", a means of earning a living which is neither destructive nor causes suffering to self or others. Lawfully earned wealth should be used only as a means to provide supporting conditions for spiritual development for oneself and practising generosity to others, including animals.

Hinduism identifies God with the deepest level of existence in all things, the self or atman. Since God is one and invisible, he/she constitutes the fundamental principle of unity which runs through all creation. If we are united at the deepest levels of ourselves with God, we will have a profound and challenging justification for ahimsa or non-violence as a way of living. All beings should be treated as oneself because we do share a single self in God. We need to be reconciled with creation through a vision of the unity of all that exists in God. It involves in the words of the Bhagavadgita "the perception of God in all things and all things in God" (6:30). This outlook provides the basis for a celebrative love of creation, a reverence for life in all its forms and an unselfish way of sharing its blessings.

The Hindu affirmation of the fundamental unity of all existence has as its corollary the truth of life's interdependence. If a vision of life prompts a sense of compassion for all

that exists, our appreciation of life's interdependence reminds us of our obligations to the rest of creation. We are indebted to non-human life forms and the inanimate world. These must also be the objects of our compassion, the recipients of our love and beneficiaries of our service. The Hindu principle of mutual obligation is based on individual life as an integral and interrelated part of all life. The uniqueness of the human being lies only in our ability to discover and celebrate life's unity in God through all that we do.

As Christians and churches we share a

common concern for the creation with our neighbours of other faiths. To dialogue with them is to rediscover and lift up those traditions within each of our faith perspectives that affirm the intrinsic value of creation and the intimate interdependence of life. We then discover areas where there is much scope for mutual enrichment and correction, as well as areas for collaboration and cooperation on many contemporary issues related to creation. The 'Integrity of Creation' is a subject on which there is much scope for dialogue and mutual learning among the religious traditions of humankind.

A Contemplative Buddhist Perspective on our Relationship with Creation

Venerable Tiradhammo Bhikkhu

The Buddha's view of Creation was primarily psychological. While not denying the existence of the objective world he pointedly emphasised the world as we experienced it through perception and thought. Thus in Buddhism subject and object are mutually interrelated. In the context of the present topic this means that environmental problems and spiritual problems are interrelated, and any attempt to solve one without considering the other is bound to fail.

More specifically, the environmental problem is a cause of a spiritual problem because the despair, frustration and confusion it is arousing in people is causing them to seek a spiritual solution. The spiritual problem is a cause for the environmental problem since it is due to so many people living materialistic-centred lives that the environment has suffered.

The Buddha refused to speculate about the nature of the world saying that it was irrelevant to the realisation of spiritual liberation. Rather, his

teachings are concerned with our relationship with the world (Creation). Creation is the arena for human action which leads either to spiritual liberation or enslavement, and our relationship to Creation displays our wisdom and challenges our ignorance.

In Buddhism all our troubles and suffering arise from our attachment to the illusion of a permanent abiding self (subject) and its permanent abiding world (object). A wise person sees that all things, including a sense of self, are relative, constantly changing, living processes, which in essence cannot be held on to. All the Buddha's teachings are aimed at providing a vast array of skillful means to lead away from or see through the illusion of selfishness. And the better we are able to practise these teachings the more our suffering will be relieved here and now.

While primarily concerned with our relationship to the subjective (psychological) world, as that is where spiritual liberation is realised,

he also gave many guidelines for a skillful relationship with the objective world. Some basic principles of this comprehensive social ethic are as follows:

- a) harmlessness and benevolence towards all living beings;
- b) tolerance towards all peoples, religions, ideologies, etc.;
- c) the practice of generosity and giving towards all beings and society;
- d) lawfully earning wealth which is then to be used to support and benefit others, (the Buddha gave the simile of a beautiful, clear lake near a village where many people may drink and receive benefit (S.I,90);
- e) obtaining a 'right livelihood' which is beneficial to oneself and others, and which is conducive to spiritual enrichment, (five 'wrong livelihoods' are: manufacture or

- sale of weapons, intoxicants and poisons, and trade in human beings or animals for slaughter);
- f) emphasising personal initiative and choice, and assuming personal responsibility for the results of our actions;
- g) since action is motivated by intention or volition, the development of tranquility and insight meditation is much emphasised for self-knowing and self-liberation;
- h) the type of government the Buddha established for the monastic Order is a non-authoritarian, participatory democracy where all business is carried out with all community members present (or having given proxy) and with unanimous approval;
- i) socially the Buddha condemned the caste system ('one is not a noble by birth but by action') and fully recognised the spiritual equality of women.

The Integrity of Creation: A Hindu Viewpoint

Anantanand Rambachan

In order to present a Hindu viewpoint on the integrity of creation, it is necessary to begin by outlining how Hinduism understands the origin of our world and of life. The universe is described in Hinduism as the purposeful and deliberate creation of an omnipotent and omniscient being. The Upanishads, which are the authoritative sources of the Hindu spiritual outlook, refute the view that the creation had its origin in non-being or nothingness. "How could being be born from non-being?" asks a famous teacher in the Chandogya Upanishad.

The accounts of the origin of creation have a certain uniformity in the Upanishads. In general, it is revealed that before the emergence or appearance of the universe, God alone

existed. The unity, oneness and indivisible nature of God is emphasized. Passages in the texts then describe a desire on the part of God to create, to multiply Himself, to be born, and to grow forth. Many analogies are then provided to describe the actual emergence of the creation from God. All these suggest God to be not only the intelligent cause of all that is created, but the material basis as well. In one of the most famous analogies in the Mundaka Upanishad, the universe is said to emerge out of God as the spider projects and withdraws unto itself the web. Other analogies liken creation to the sparks emerging from a single fire, or to plants sprouting from the earth. All of these images suggest that the creation has its cause in the Lord

alone, who is both its origin, sustenance and end. Having brought forth everything out of Himself, God, in the Upanishads is then described as entering into all created things.

In Hinduism, therefore, the entire creation could be conceived as the visible form of the Lord and Ramanuja, the distinguished Hindu philosopher, has represented the creation as the body of God. He has described God as the soul of creation. The Supreme Reality creates the world of things and beings out of Itself and abides in them all. The Bhagavadgita describes the entire creation as being threaded on God as rows of gems on a string (7.7). It rests in Him, even as the mighty wind moving everywhere rests in space (9.6). The Bhagavadgita identifies the creator with the radiance in the moon and sun, the sapidity in waters, the pure fragrance in the earth and the brilliance in fire (7:8-9). While affirming God as the sole source of creation and His immanence in it, Hinduism has not lost sight of his transcendent nature. In the famous Purusha-sukta hymn of the Rig-Veda, we are told that He pervades the whole world by a quarter of His being while three-fourths of Him stand over as immortal in the sky.

In the Hindu tradition, therefore, there is a tremendous emphasis on God as present in and pervading the entire created world. Having brought everything out of Himself, He supports and indwells it all. For the Hindu who properly appreciates this, the entire creation is endowed with a special sanctity and every form becomes precious. For the Hindu tradition, the Ultimate Reality or Truth has the highest value as the goal and destiny of our lives. God is identified with this ultimate Truth and the creation becomes valuable because of His presence at the heart of all things. The value of the creation is derived from it being a manifestation of God.

In fact, the spiritually ignorant in Hinduism is one who treats the universe as having an independent reality and does not see it as being grounded and rooted in God.

With what does Hinduism identify God in all of creation? It identifies Him with the deepest level of existence in all things - the Self or atman. Because the Lord is one and indivisible, He constitutes the fundamental principle of unity which runs through all of creation. He is the integrity of creation. Hindu ethics ought to be firmly rooted in this vision of the unity of all life. If, as the Hindu tradition affirms, we are united as the deepest levels of the Self in God, this provides a profound and challenging justification for the Golden rule as a way of living. All beings should be treated as oneself because we do in fact share a single Self in God. The outcome of this should be a way of daily living in which we try to minimize the harm caused to others. This is the principle of ahimsa, of avoiding injury to others. But ahimsa can easily become a passive attitude of non-injury. In order to transform our attitudes in Hinduism to creation, it must become an active principle of seeking to promote the well-being and happiness of all created things.

The Hindu belief in the essential unity of all that exists does not only have implications for the quality of our relationships with other human beings. Our relationships with the animal and natural world would also have to be transformed. Reckless and insensitive exploitation of these are intolerable. We are called upon to develop our sense of identity and empathy with the natural world. Our selfish abuse of creation is partially due to our alienation from the rest of the universe. It is an alienation which has its roots in our fragmented and broken view of creation and not in its wholeness, unity and integrity.

We need to be reconciled with creation through a vision of the unity of all that exists in God. It is this which gives rise to a deep sense of compassion for our fellow-beings and the sub-human world.

The Hindu affirmation of the fundamental unity of all existence has as its corollary the truth of life's interdependence. The interdependence of nature is a truth to which our understanding of all natural processes bear witness. In violating creation, we unknowingly violate ourselves. If our vision of life's unity in God prompts a sense of compassion for all that exists, our appreciation of life's interdependence reminds us of our daily obligations to the rest of creation. In our times, the quest for personal, communal and national rights is not complemented by an equal emphasis on our obligations. While not consistently emphasizing the rights which ought to be intrinsic to every human being, Hinduism, in theory at least, has stressed our continuous indebtedness to creation. It has identified the areas of our indebtedness and consequent daily obligations. For the creation and the gift of life, we ought to honour God through worship. For the recording, preservation and transmission of spiritual values and wisdom, we are indebted to our spiritual teachers. We seek to repay this through study and teaching. For all the blessings of family life, we are required to pray for the welfare of our departed ancestors and continuously serve those who are with us. For the many gifts of life in society, we ought to unselfishly promote the happiness of our fellow human-beings. Finally, the Hindu tradition reminds us of our indebtedness to non-human life forms and the inanimate world. These must also be the objects of our compassion, the recipients of our love and the beneficiaries of our service. The Hindu principle of mutual obligations undoubtedly requires a contempo-

rary reformulation, but it is based on the conception of individual life as an integral and interrelated part of all life. We are born debtors, owing more to the creation than the creation owes to us.

There are two principles within Indian religious traditions which are relevant and resourceful in their implications for our relationship to creation. The first of these is dharma. Dharma is derived from a root meaning to support, to sustain or to hold together. At a social level, it includes all those principles which hold a human community together. While dharma affirms our rights to decently meet legitimate wants, it reminds us that we are truly human only in a social context. To satisfy one's needs in a manner which deprives another of the right to his/her needs or causes suffering is contrary to dharma. It is the capacity to respond to others, to enlarge our horizons to embrace the needs of others which makes us uniquely human. In a wider sense, however, dharma does not only refer to the holding together of human society, but to everything which is vital and necessary for the balance and harmony of the cosmos. In other words, the dharma principle does not only demand concern for other human beings in our actions, but concern for the harmony of creation as a whole. If one had to put this in contemporary language, one would speak of the concern for nature as a closed system or for ecological unity.

The second principle which has implications for our relationship to creation is the karma doctrine. Through this doctrine, the Hindu tradition views the entire universe as a moral stage where we are held individually and collectively responsible for all our actions. The doctrine of karma, however, does not limit moral responsibility to our relationship with other human beings, but includes life in its widest sense. We are under

the continuous judgement of a moral law in our relationship with everything in creation.

Hinduism has recognized and affirmed the uniqueness and privilege of a human birth. It is unique and superior, not because it confers upon us the right to dominate and press all other life forms into our service, but because, among all other beings, we can discover and celebrate life's unity in God. We can enlarge our understanding of self to embrace all life. There is a hierarchy of life in Hinduism and the human being occupies the apex of this hierarchy because of his or her spiritual potential. Hinduism, however, has not always satisfactorily resolved and balanced its priorities in the competition for scarce resources among species. Human needs have often been overlooked. The tradition has not wrestled sufficiently with the practical implications of its vision of life's unity.

An altered attitude to creation must have its genesis in a transformed

understanding of existence. To enter into a compassionate and reverential relationship with all that exists, we must not only learn to celebrate its diversity but look beyond that diversity to the unifying Truth which runs through everything, including ourselves. It involves, in the words of the Bhagavadgita, "the perception of the Lord in all things and all things in the Lord." (6:30) It is an outlook in which the diversified existence of everything is perceived as rooted in One (13:30). In learning to affirm an unlimited Reality which runs through everything, we discover an inner fullness in identifying that Reality in ourselves. Rejoicing in the fullness of God everywhere, we enter into a non-exploitative relationship with creation. We learn to care for the creation, even as it bountifully cares for us. The spiritual vision includes but exceeds an ecological concern. It provides a basis for a celebrative love of creation, a reverence for life in all its forms, and an unselfish way of sharing its many blessings.

Bible and Ecology - Some Areas for Exploration

Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Magonet

Any attempt at examining a "Jewish" approach to the problem of ecology must take note of the warning by Louis Jacobs that "the lesson to be learned from the (Jewish) sources is only an indirect one. These sources do not deal with the problem on a global scale....but with the more limited problem of how city dwellers are to cope with their environment and how the individual Jew is to avoid wasting nature's resources." Indeed it is clear that three of the major treatments of the theme (by Freudenstein, Halfand and Lamm) all focus on a few basic texts and interpretations so as

to describe an attitude to the issue rather than any comprehensive attempt to grapple with specific contemporary problems. If our brief is to look at biblical material alone, albeit sometimes through Rabbinic eyes, the distance in time and experience from today would seem to further decrease the relevance to contemporary problems. Certainly many discussions on the problem seem to have limited themselves to a very few biblical passages (notably the first chapters of Genesis, Psalms 8 and 104) as if to affirm that general propositions as pegs for wider speculation, are all

that are really available to us today. While recognizing the difficulties, this paper would like to suggest that there are other questions posed by the Hebrew Bible which have not yet been fully explored. This is clearly no more than a tentative initial approach to material that requires considerably more study.

Norman Lamm rightly takes issue with those who take Gen. 1:20 in isolation. "The Torah's respect for non-human nature is evident in the restrictions that follow immediately upon the 'subdue' commandment; man is permitted only to eat herbs and greens, not to abuse the resources of nature. Furthermore, this mastery over nature is limited to vegetables for the first ten generations. Vegetarianism yields to carnivorousness only after the Flood when, as a concession, God permits the eating of meat to the sons of Noah. Even then, the right to devour flesh is circumscribed with a number of protective prohibitions, such as the warnings against eating blood and taking human life (Gen. 9:2-6.)

No less important for initial consideration is the juxtaposition of the two creation accounts which set against each other the two "faces" of man: the peak of creation who is to subdue the earth, the creature of the dust in whom God has breathed the breath of life, who is placed in the Garden to "serve it and to keep it".

Freudenstein begins with Deut. 20:19-20 "When you besiege a city many days to bring it into your power by making war against it, you shall not destroy the trees thereof by swinging an axe against them; for from them you may eat but not destroy them, for the tree of the field is a man's life..." Von Rad remarks that "the fact that Deuteronomy contains in the context of its laws concerning war a rule to protect fruit-growing is probably unique in the history of the growth of a humane

outlook in ancient times. Deuteronomy is really concerned to restrain the vandalism of war and not with considerations of utility." One might add to this observation the sense of priorities expressed in the same section (20:5-7) which release from military duty those who have just begun the tasks of establishing a home, a family or a plot of land. It is precisely this extreme example of a war situation where preservation is demanded that highlights the importance of concern for such matters in normal circumstances.

Other sources of halakhic legislation in the area of ecology include Lev. 25:34 which is seen to concern the provision of a "green belt" around the cities of the Levites, Deut. 23:13-15 on the disposal of sewage, Lev. 22:28 and Deut. 22:6 are seen by Nachmanides as concerned with the danger of the extinction of a particular species, and Freudenstein notes in this connection the narrative of Noah's ark and the law in the Holiness Code Lev. 19:19 "You shall not breed your animal in a mixture of species" which "proclaims the sacredness of each species and its individuality."

While these passages illustrate isolated instances of concern, and depend upon Rabbinic exegesis to place them more clearly within our context, can we find more evidence of a biblical attitude towards man's place on earth and the role he is expected to fulfil in relation to nature? A Rabbinic warning is sounded early in Genesis to man's use and abuse of power.

The entry into the land of Canaan is to be a gradual affair because of the readiness of the land to revert to its wild state (Ex. 23:29-30); "I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate, and the animals of the field multiply against you. Little by little I will drive them out from

before you, until you be fruitful and inherit the land." The powers of chaos are always waiting in the wings if man's relationship to God is not properly maintained; plagues, crop failure, marauding animals, drought.

But if we are to confine ourselves to Israel's relationship to its land, some remarkable restrictions on her freedom are given. Firstly in the mixing of different species of animals and seeds (Lev. 19:19, Deut. 22:9-11). Whatever the origins of these enactments, perhaps in the idea that pairing of different species of animal goes against a divine plan for nature, it recognizes a limitation on man's freedom to use the land and animals as he wishes. Similarly restrictive is the law of "Orlah" (Lev. 19: 23-25) which prohibits the use of fruit from newly planted fruit trees for the first three years. More dramatic are the regulations about the Shabbat as a "tithe of time" consecrated to God. By imposing the seven day cycle on the world, at that moment the role of nature in determining time (solar and lunar calendars) is abolished and God's time dominates the world. But clearly the restrictions on work, both for man and animals, impose severe limitations on man's freedom to exploit the land as he wishes - indeed a wider examination of the Shabbat regulations in regard to this concept is a necessary adjunct to any approach to biblical concerns with man's relationship to his environment.

In conjunction with this the laws of the Sabbatical year should be given their due significance. In the biblical text, the sequent to the Sabbatical year is the Sabbath of the weekly cycle in which the ox and ass, the son of the handmaiden and the stranger are granted rest. The same motivation informs the year of the Sabbath. The poor are assured of their bread together with the wealthy landowner. Even the animals and wild

beasts are once more admitted into the fellowship which they enjoyed in the first days after creation. 'And the Sabbath-produce of the land shall be for food for you, for you and for your servant and for your maid, and for your hired servant and for the settler by your side that sojourns with you, and for your cattle and for the beasts that are in your land, shall all the increase thereof be for food.' (Lev. 25:6-7) He sees the effect of the sabbatical year, however, not as restricting man's freedom to exploit the land, but as a way of releasing man from his bondage to it. "The Sabbatical year aims at liberating man from his kinship with the earth, in favour of a new relationship with God and his fellow-creatures. By prohibiting the tasks associated with husbandry, the Torah has for a complete year broken the chains that tie man to the earth, so that he rises above the natural order itself. No longer dependent upon its rigorous laws, he receives his bounties directly from the hand of God who commands His blessing upon the land so that it produces a threefold crop to make provision against possible starvation (Lev. 25:20-22).

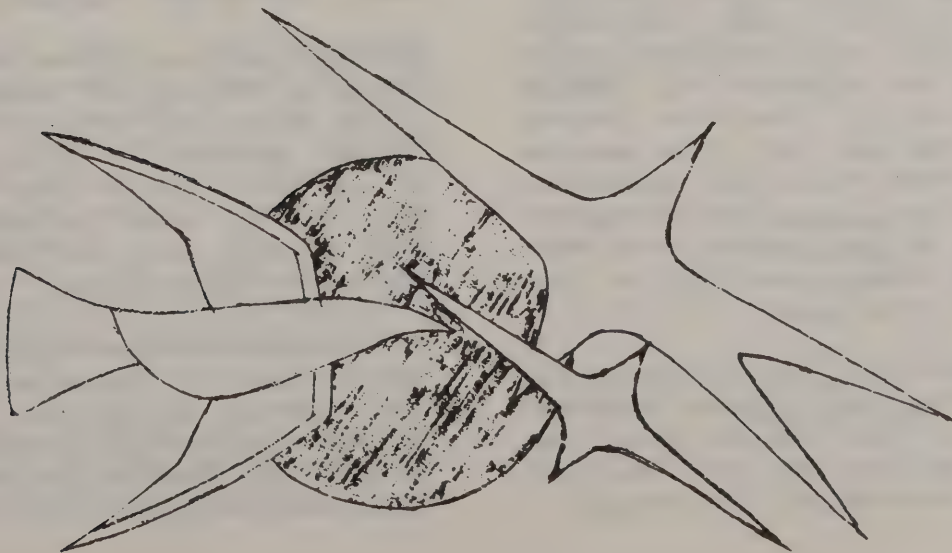
We have thus seen two limitations on man's freedom of action; the way in which nature must be controlled if man is to "have dominion" over the earth, and the degree to which his freedom to exploit nature is limited both by specific legislation on the mixing of different species, on his use of the produce, and by the restrictions on the time he may give to this work - all of which are designed to remind him that he is but a guest on a land that God owns.

A final thought should be given to the degree to which nature is recognized as having its own inbuilt laws to which man must also relate. Clearly much of Hebrew thought concerns itself with emancipation from nature

worship and the establishing of God's rule over creation, nevertheless whether on the level of an awareness of the causal relationship between phenomena (Amos 3:3-6) or the complex pattern of interdependence between obedience to God and the fertility of the soil (Deut. 11:13-17), the Bible recognizes a harmony in the universe within which man, too, must find his place. The term mishpat in passages like Jer. 8:7 seems to be a key to this concept. "Even the stork in the heaven knows her times, and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming. But my people know not the mishpat of the Lord." (cf. Song of Songs 2:10-14) Even more expressive is Isa. 28:23-29 where mishpat comes in the middle of the passage which is often the climactic point in Hebrew poetry. "Give ear and hear my voice, hearken and hear my speech. Does the plowman do nothing but plow, and turn the soil and harrow it? When he has levelled it, does he not scatter the fennel, sow cummin, put in wheat and barley and on the edges, spelt? And he treats each according to the mishpat which his God teaches him. For fennel must not be crushed, nor a drag be rolled over cummin, fennel must be beaten with a stick and cummin with a flail. Does a man crush wheat? No,

he does not thresh it endlessly. When he has rolled the drag over it he winnows it without crushing it. This, too, comes from the Lord of Hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and whose deeds are very great."

We may summarise all that we have examined so far - on the tension between man's power and his limitations and the dynamic between his freedom and his need to conform to certain patterns within nature, by reference to Psalm 8 and a rarely observed element of its structure. If man is "little less than divine", wherein lies this "little less"? One answer is provided by comparing the verses describing God's power (2-4) with those describing man's (5-9) - as a glance at the Hebrew text immediately affirms. For whereas the former consists of a series of sentences of irregular length and metre - indicating the freedom of God to act outside of any formal structure, the description of man's power is given in a series of regular, formally balanced parallel verses, thus setting man's much vaunted power into a clearly confined framework - bordered, incidentally, at the beginning and end by the repeated phrase: "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name throughout all the earth."



Buddhists and Christians in the Search for Peace with Justice

Declaration

(The following Declaration was made at a Buddhist-Christian meeting organized by the sub-unit on Dialogue, on the Justice and Peace aspects of the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) process. The meeting which brought together 40 persons was held in Seoul, Korea in November 1988. Papers from this meeting will be brought out early in 1989.)

A group of forty Christians and Buddhists from Korea, Thailand, Japan, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, India, Tibet and Burma met in Seoul, Korea, from 22-27 November 1988 to discuss the theme "Buddhists and Christians in the Search for Peace with Justice". We also benefitted from the insights of Buddhists and Christians from North America.

We are convinced that justice and peace are but two sides of the same coin and that peace is impossible except on the basis of justice. Peace without justice would indeed be a false peace and a delusion.

In many Asian countries peace has been destroyed or is being threatened because we have not heeded the cries of the poor and oppressed for justice and human dignity. Threats to justice and peace come not only from outside powers but from within our countries. However, we would particularly express our concern for the security and independence of small countries on the periphery of large ones.

We are mindful that our various religious traditions have greatly enriched the lives of our nations down the ages. We believe that they continue to provide the strength and resources

we need for the solution of the problems we face today. Our Scriptures have been written in a different age, but if they are interpreted relevantly, they can provide the guidance our age requires. Our religions affirm the dignity and inviolability of life and it is our duty to ensure that a fully human life is made possible for all, irrespective of class, caste, race or sex.

Both Buddhism and Christianity have always seen a simple life-style resulting from voluntary renunciation as an ideal of life. Our lives particularly in the midst of the poor, have to be lived under the challenge of this ideal, and we must espouse their cause.

The Asian poor are forced to sell their labour in foreign and local markets at a low price, and even to sell their bodies, because of unjust structures in our world and in Asia itself. We have allowed other considerations to take priority over our commitment to our fellow human beings.

All institutionalized religions include within them both liberative and oppressive elements and we must distinguish between them, so that we can strengthen beliefs and features of our institutions that contribute to, rather than

stand in the way of, total human liberation. We recognize that many of our religious institutions themselves are oppressive even though they ought to be instruments and models of liberation.

Our attempt to be neutral in the midst of the conflicts of our time is in fact an option in favour of the status quo and the powerful within it.

As men and women who practice our respective religions we recognize our own responsibility for the forces that lead to the breakdown of justice and peace. Personal transformation and social transformation are both urgent needs and must necessarily go together.

We urge that the nuclear threat which is a danger to the whole world be removed from our continent and that Asia be recognized as a continent of peace. Asia should not be a dumping ground for nuclear waste nor an arena for superpower conflicts.

Though most Asians are poor, Asian lives are worth no less than the lives of any others. We are appalled by the way in which chemical plants and the use of various insecticides, weedicides, pharmaceuticals and drugs as well as the dumping of industrial wastes, threaten our lives and our environment.

We recognize formal and non-formal education as tools for peace and urge that national integration and justice should be recognized goals of our educational systems in order that peace may be ensured. We particularly draw attention to the ways in which television and some toys and games condition our children to accept ruthless competition, injustice, violence and war.

We are greatly saddened by the increase in violence in so many Asian countries, both in its institutional forms and in

the resort to violence as a means of social change. We plead that the principle of non-violence (ahimsa) be upheld. We urge an end to militarization on the part of states, and we urge that non-violent forms of protest be developed and permitted as a means of securing change. It is when human rights are denied that a people feel compelled to take up arms.

Interreligious dialogue leads to greater understanding between people of different religious traditions and serves to remove mutual suspicion and prejudice that have stood in the way of relationships of mutual respect. Such dialogue is urgent in all our multi-religious societies so that people of different religions can work and struggle together in facing our common problems.

We also commend dialogue as a way of life that should govern our political and social life. We need to cultivate a culture of dialogue that would direct all areas of human conduct, so that we can overcome the confrontational and violent attitudes prevailing in many of our societies. We see such attitudes to be in direct contradiction to all that our two religious traditions stand for.

We welcome the seminal movements within both Buddhism and Christianity which seek to promote dialogue as a way of life that should govern all aspects of our life.

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A HINDU - CHRISTIAN FUNERAL

Stanley J. Samartha

(Dr. S.J. Samartha is Visiting Professor at the United Theological College in Bangalore, South India. He has served with the Geneva office of the World Council of Churches, as Director of the Dialogue sub-unit, and is the author of several works relating to Hinduism and Christianity.)

He died on Palm Sunday morning, April 12, 1987. In a week's time, he would have celebrated his eighty-sixth birthday. For the last couple of years, he was bed-ridden but could recognize his friends and sometimes talk to them. During my visits, I was always impressed by his gentle face, ready smile, and soft voice. He never once complained about his illness. Whenever I offered to pray at his bedside, he welcomed it.

He was an official in the State Department of Education. He fell in love with a Christian woman and married her. He had promised his father that in order to marry a Christian he would not betray the faith of his forefathers. The continuity of Hindu heritage through the centuries and the depth of its accumulated tradition were too precious for him to exchange for the sake of personal happiness. He kept his promise till the end. He had made his son promise him that when he died he would be cremated according to Hindu rites. The son, too, kept his promise.

It is more correct to say that he knew me rather than I knew him. His wife belonged to the congregation of which my father was the pastor. He and my father were great friends. He never prevented his wife and children from going to church or participating in

Christian activities. With his permission, my father baptized his children and, later on, confirmed them as members of the church. He sometimes attended church services, but he remained a Hindu all his life.

I

The funeral service was at four o'clock in the early evening at the house of his son in Bangalore. The son told me that, remembering my father, he had asked that I say a few words about him and offer a prayer at the funeral. I gladly agreed to do so.

There was a large gathering at the service. He had many Hindu and Christian relatives and friends. Some of them had come from places as far away as Calcutta and Delhi, Cochin and Mangalore. They were all sitting together in the gathering. No one tried to behave like a theological porcupine or a spiritual jellyfish. They were all human beings drawn together in the common bond of grief.

In my brief speech, I referred to his life as a husband, father, grandfather, and friend, mentioning that although he lived within the fellowship of a Christian family, he remained faithful to his Hindu heritage. I pointed out that even as we Christians are committed to our faith

so are our Hindu neighbours committed to theirs, and that therefore, we should respect each others' cherished beliefs and convictions.

In my prayer, I made use of an Upanishadic reference to Ultimate Reality as "that from which everything is born, that by which everything that is born is sustained, and that into which everything returns at the end" (Taittiriya Upanishad III:1). Since it was Palm Sunday, I referred to the journey of Jesus who had started his journey from the Father, and was now returning by way of the cross and the resurrection. I affirmed that, at the moment of death, our faith and hope as Christians are grounded in Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord. The prayer was unmistakably Christian in content and character.

Christians had the first part of the service. The familiar words of Jesus were read: "I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25-26). Two Christian ministers were present, one in an official role, the other in a clerical collar. The order of service of the Church of South India for the occasion is beautiful and moving. The whole architectural construction with hymns, readings, and prayers, has spiritual depth, theological strength, and pastoral comfort. It was a clear affirmation of Christian faith and hope in God through Jesus Christ.

Hindu friends took the second part of the service. Nachiketas said to Yama (the god of death), "In the world of heaven there is no fear whatever, you are not there and no one is afraid of old age. Overcoming both hunger and thirst, and leaving sorrow behind, one rejoices in the world of heaven" (Kathopanishad I:12). On the right side of the body, near the head, was the broken half of a coconut with a bit of camphor burning within it. On

the left, was a brass vessel with water from the Ganga river and leaves from tulsi (a plant sacred to the Hindus). An earthen pot with glowing coals was at the foot of the body.

Usually, the eldest son of the dead person officiates during a Hindu funeral ceremony (anthyashti), but in this case, since his son was a Christian, the eldest son of the dead person's sister, who was a Hindu, took over the leadership. All this was done without the slightest bit of argument, confusion, or hesitation.

II

Hindu friends slowly walked around the body in a dignified procession. Usually, women do not take part in such ceremonies. But in this case I noticed that women and children were also in the circle. Each one took some tulsi leaves and put a few drops of water into the mouth of the body, folded hands in the namasthe gesture, and touched the feet. They were quiet, solemn, moving with a sense of rhythm. No Hindu priest was present nor were any mantras recited.

The body was carried out both by his Hindu and Christian relatives, and placed on a wooden plank to be taken to the crematorium. And again, assisted by both his Hindu and Christian relatives the body was placed on a green bamboo frame, on which fresh banana leaves were spread, flowers were placed on it, sparks from the pot of fire dropped on the body, and then, at the turn of a switch, it quietly moved into the glowing door of the crematorium. The ashes were later collected and taken home.

Each rite had its distinctiveness and, perhaps in the perceptions of the people, each had something meaningful to say to the other. I was also struck by the differences between the two.

The Christian service was formal, orderly, well-structured, and, with the minister in a robe, there was no doubt that it was official. In contrast, the Hindu rite was informal, less rigid, with hardly any words uttered and no priest being present. All the Hindu group participated in the performance of the rite.

One could not but become aware of the silence that dominated the Hindu rite. No speeches were made, no mantras recited and, with the exception of three words of a chant when the body was carried out of the house, there was no singing. The Christians, on the other hand, seemed to be very uneasy about any periods of silence. The gaps between prayers and readings were constantly being filled with the singing of English hymns to Western tunes.

Except for the sign of the cross, there were no other visible symbols which could add to the meaning of the Christian service. Hindus had a number of them, all taken from nature itself - flowers, coconut, tulsi leaves, water from the river Ganga, the bamboo framework, banana leaves, and, of course, fire. Agni (fire) has a special place in Hindu symbolism. Agni is the priest of the gods and the god of priests. It is through fire that sacrifices reach God. Agni destroys, purifies, and illumines, and is regarded as one of the five components of the cosmos.

During the whole period of about two hours, I did not notice any individuals from either group openly or discreetly seeking to separate themselves from the other. Both Christians and Hindus, without being asked, left their shoes and sandals outside before entering the room where the body was laid. It was obvious that to many Christians the Hindu rite was entirely new, and that it was the first time for many Hindus to come near a Christian funeral service. Hindus and Christians do pay

a visit to the house of a dead friend of either faith, but that is very different from being present during the ceremonies. Some were probably uneasy, but none showed it. Each group was eager to see what the rite of the other meant.

During the next few days, I talked to several people, both Hindu and Christian, who were present at the time. None expressed any difficulty or felt offended or uneasy at being present together during the ceremonies. One Hindu lady, the wife of a medical doctor, told me that she was impressed with the orderliness and discipline of the Christian service and its Christian content. It was the first time that she had ever been present at such a service.

III

Funeral rites, Hindu or Christian, have an important contribution to make to the religious life of a community of faith. First, based on the religious faith behind them, they are believed to influence the destiny of the person and to help in the metamorphosis of the body. When it is believed that there is only one life, there is more pressure and anxiety at death than when it is accepted that there is a plurality of births and deaths, offering more opportunities for the individual to realize his or her destiny. Death, however, is never regarded as the final end. It is a deliverance or transition or passage into the mystery of life, the perception of its meaning being reflected in the funeral rites.

Second, funeral rites help to comfort the bereaved. The words and symbols reassure, strengthen, and sustain those who mourn the loss of their loved ones, thus helping to heal the wound of death. Third, all funeral rites have a community dimension. This is one reason why so many

relatives and friends make every effort to be present at a funeral. The ongoing life of the community is disturbed by the loss of one of its members. The gap left by that death has to be closed, slowly, gently, and firmly so that the living can go on. Funeral rites thus help to revitalize the life of the community broken by death.

When the mood is one of reverence and silence, one does not feel justified in raising any questions. And yet, it may be that what strikes one deeply at the moment should be shared with others as well.

Can one body, in the utter helplessness of death, carry the weight of two religious rites? How will the destiny of the person be affected by this on the other side of death?

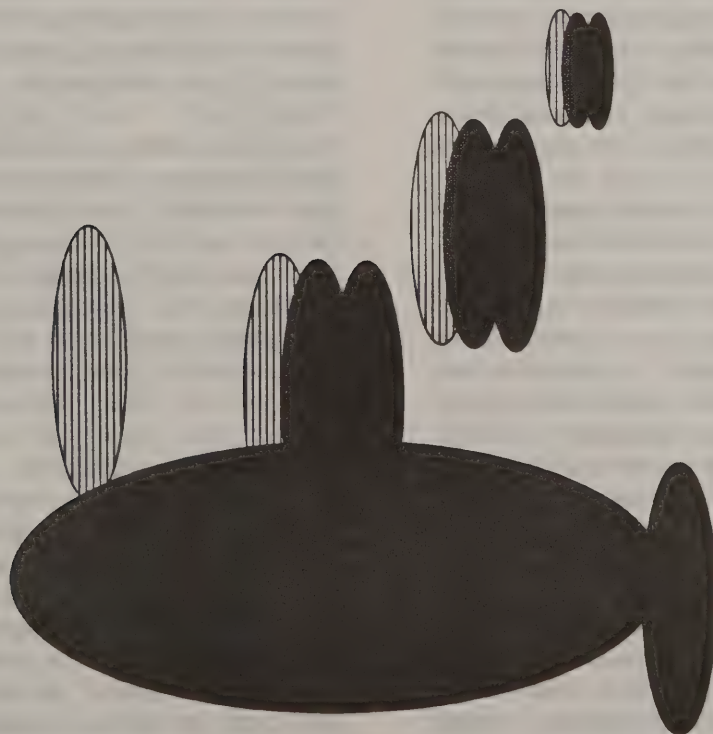
Can the same body be claimed by two religious groups, Hindu and Christian? Why not? Was the deceased not related

to both Hindus and Christians biologically and spiritually?

In India, the distance between the temple and the church is very great, almost unbridgeable. At a time when religious fundamentalism is on the rise and the politicization of religions is on the increase, this senior friend in his death brought together his Hindu and Christian relatives and friends who otherwise would have never come together. Immediately after the rites, each group went away separately, perhaps never to meet again in the near future.

Is it not strange, even tragic, that life should separate religious people but that death should bring them together, if only for a brief moment? Did he live as a Christian and die as a Hindu, or did he live as a Hindu and die as a Christian? Who knows?

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Christian - Muslim Summer Dialogue Programme in the Philippines, A Field Education Project of Dialogue and Conscientization

Hilario M. Gomez

Rationale and Description of the Programme

The Moros are the oppressed Muslim Filipinos concentrated mostly in the southwestern part of the large island of Mindanao in the southern Philippines. In defense of their homeland, freedom, and religion, they battled the Spanish invaders from 1578 to 1898, then the Americans from 1899 to 1915, and in recent years the Christian Filipinos, who were the successors to American rule after 1946.

Living in a nation dominated by Christian Filipinos, the Moros have increasingly felt that they have been treated merely as second-class citizens as they have in the past been economically neglected and oppressed. Their situation worsened after independence in 1946 due to two principal reasons: 1) the coming of landless farmers from the north - all Christian Filipinos - in search of a better living in Mindanao, who drove many Moros away from their traditionally-held territories. The programme of settling Christians in Mindanao was initiated by the Philippine government, not only to increase agricultural production (following the American lead earlier), but also to find an answer to the Hukbalahap-agrarian problem in Central Luzon. The result was obvious, increased hostilities between Muslims and Christians. Among other things, this was because there is a long history of animosity and conflict between Christians and Muslims in the Philippines. This conflict has been maintained and deepened because these two groups lead two different ways of

life, dictated mostly by different religious orientations.

2) The second, and perhaps more important reason, has been the imposition of the much-publicized martial law in 1972. Although martial law is already a thing of the past, the effects of the breakdown of law and order that it spawned remains, and continues to sow trouble in Mindanao.

Since 1972, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the main body of Moro rebels, has been fighting the Philippine government. This civil war has caused tremendous difficulties in that paradise of an island, especially among innocent civilians. The situation also worsened as relations between Muslims and Christians broke down completely, and, as a result hostilities deepened.

This programme of dialogue and conscientization seeks to participate in the search for peace and reconciliation in the Philippines. This basic aim can be accomplished by educating seminarians, letting them know about and experience the Mindanao problem at first hand. The programme operates in the belief that religious leaders are among the most effective agents of change in a society. Seminarians who know the reason for the hostilities, have lived with poor Muslims and Christians in their own communities in rural Mindanao, and have been conscientized to a degree, can sympathetically understand their causes. They are, therefore, in a better position to find a more viable means of proclaiming the Gospel of love, justice

and peace to these depressed and oppressed peoples.

The Dialogue programme, now in its tenth year, is basically part of the theological education process in the Philippines. It seeks to offer a field education experience of dialogue and conscientization to seminarians of five major Protestant/non-Roman Catholic groups in the country. These are St. Andrews Theological Seminary (Philippine Episcopal Church and Philippine Independent Church), Silliman University Divinity School (United Church of Christ in the Philippines), Central Philippine University College of Theology (Convention of Philippine Baptists), Union Theological Seminary (United Methodist Church and UCCP), and, starting this year, Northern Christian College in Laoag City (UCCP).

Up to thirty seminarians are made to live with Moros and Christians in selected Mindanao communities. They participate in community activities, such as religious programmes, small-scale developmental projects, educational activities, etc. As a result, the seminarians are able to talk/dialogue informally with the poor Moros and Christians. Informal and spontaneous dialogues can be augmented by planned and structured dialogues on such themes as concepts of man, God, the scriptures, from Muslim and Christian perspectives. Muslim-Christian relations and the economic needs of the community are good topics for dialogue.

These activities certainly mean much to the seminarians. Most seminarians from Luzon and the Visayas have not yet been to Mindanao, much less encountered a Moro prior to their joining the programme. At best, they may have seen Moro peddlers (mostly Maranaos from Lanao) in the markets and on the sidewalks in Metro Manila, Cebu and other urban centres. In the

process of interacting with Moros and Christians in Mindanao communities, a friendly relationship can ensue as false images are broken when both the seminarians and the Moros know each better. For example, they both learn that there are kind, sincere and honest Moros and Christians who are willing to cooperate in the improvement of their communities and human relations. In the past summer programme, seminarians have experienced exactly this, as they participated in the repair of a mosque and madrasah (schoolhouse). Seminarians in 1980 also cooperated in the construction of a small dam in the Muslim village of Tarakan, Dinas, Zamboanga del sur.

The learning experience, of course, happens both ways. The seminarians and their Moro friends learn to trust each other. The comments and observations of the seminarians indicate a marked change of attitudes towards the Moros. The befriended Moros also expressed the same change of attitude. Many of them now believe that not all Christians are bad. Said Ibrahim Casan, a Moro youth leader from Tarakan: "You are different. While other Christians drove us out of our homes in the past, you have come to help build our community."

Our experience proved that dialogue, to be meaningful, must be a dialogue at the grassroot level. This should be a dialogue in community between people who are in close proximity to the situation - in this case, seminarians along with Muslims and Christians in the same village who have borne the brunt of the breakdown of Christian-Muslim relations in the past. The more recent Muslim-Christian dialogues, sponsored by the government of President Corazon C. Aquino, are in danger of degenerating into "mere talks" between élitist leaders whose credentials are questionable. The past national dialogues between Muslims and Christians sponsored by

government, civil and religious leaders exhibited the same tendency, as participants were mostly from sectors considered "safe" by the government or those with their own vested interests and not necessarily those of the people.

On the contrary, the dialogue in community, which this present dialogue programme is promoting, is a dialogue between the common people, the am-haaretz, the poor and suffering Muslim and Christian, for they are the ones who are victims of the oppressive situation perpetrated by a corrupt system. They should be led into an awareness that they are both victims and in the same boat - and therefore comrades with a common enemy. The seminarians, with raised consciousness - because of the live-in experience with poor Muslims and Christians and because of the dialogue in community they have participated in - could be in the best position to help the Church develop a programme of participation. They could help build a peaceful and just society in the Philippines, where everyone can co-exist in harmony and peace, fulfilling the injunction of Jesus Christ "to love one another".

As in previous programmes, the 1988 dialogue programme was conducted during the Philippine summer months of March and April. The programme started with an orientation, group dynamics and acquaintance programmes between participating seminarians and the general orientation programme and was conducted on the campus of Silliman University. The Rev. Sally Villagante, chaplain of the SU Medical Center, provided leadership in the group dynamics and other related activities.

After the orientation programme, the seminarians proceeded to Mindanao where they were fielded in the following areas: Zamboanga City, Basilan, Limpapa, Pikit, Cotabato City, and Kauswagan. The seminarians lived with

Muslims and Christians in these communities for up to six weeks. There they participated in various community activities and were given opportunities to live with Muslim families and participate in the Muslim's everyday life - including preparation and eating of common meals. This is the Dialogue proper - a kind of dialogue in community life.

After this experience, the seminarians gathered in Iligan City for the final sharing of experiences and evaluation of the programme before returning home, rich with experience and conscientized.

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The Churches and the Jewish People, Towards a New Understanding

(The Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People (CCJP) which brings together, under the direction of the sub-unit on Dialogue, Christians who are engaged in promoting Jewish-Christian dialogues, met in Sigtuna, Sweden from 31 October - 4 November 1988. As a part of its work in Sigtuna it finalized a document on "The Churches and the Jewish People: Towards a New Understanding" which is printed below. The full Minutes of the meeting are available on request.)

A. Preamble

We live in an age of worldwide struggle for survival and liberation. The goals of "breaking down of barriers between people and the promotion of one human family in justice and peace", as expressed by the Basis of the World Council of Churches, constitute priorities among all people of living faiths. Through the "Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths", adopted by the Central Committee in 1977 and 1979, the World Council of Churches has encouraged the growth of mutual respect and understanding between and among religions as an important basis for human co-operation and harmony. Christians confess that God, whom they have come to know in Jesus Christ, has created all human beings in the divine image and that God desires that all people live in love and righteousness. The search for community in a pluralistic world involves a positive acceptance of the existence and value of distinct historical communities of faith relating to one another on the basis of mutual trust and respect for the integrity of each other's identities. Given the diversity of living faiths, their adherents should be free to "define themselves", as well as to witness to their own gifts, in respectful dialogue with others.

While the promotion of mutual respect and understanding among people of all living faiths is essential, we as Christians recognize a special relationship between Jews and Christians because of our shared roots in biblical revelation. Paradoxically, this special relationship has often been a source of tension and alienation in history with destructive consequences for our Jewish neighbours. We believe that an honest and prayerful consideration of the ties and divergences between Jewish and Christian faiths today, leading to better understanding and mutual respect, is in harmony with the will of one living God to whom both faith communities confess obedience.

B. Historical Note

Since the end of War War II the WCC and its various agencies have shown serious, albeit periodic, concern regarding Jewish-Christian relations. The First Assembly in Amsterdam (1948) acknowledged "the special meaning of the Jewish people for Christian faith" and denounced antisemitism "as absolutely irreconcilable with the profession and practice of the Christian faith" and "a sin against God and man." The Third Assembly in New Delhi (1961) reaffirmed the WCC's previous

repudiation of antisemitism and, at the same time, rejected the notion that Jews today share in guilt for the death of Christ:

In Christian teaching the historic events which led to the crucifixion should not be so presented as to fasten upon the Jewish people of today responsibilities which belong to our corporate responsibility.

The Commission on Faith and Order at its Bristol meeting (1967) accepted and commended for further theological study a report that called for a systematic rethinking of the Church's theological understanding of Judaism.* This important proposal was based especially on the following points:

- 1) Affirmation of the continuity between the Church and the Jewish people, "Christ himself (being) the ground and substance of this continuity";
- 2) Affirmation of the positive significance of the continuing existence of the Jewish people as "a living and visible sign" of God's faithfulness and love;
- 3) Rejection of the notion that the sufferings of the Jews are proof of any special guilt before God and recognition of guilt on the part of Christians who have persecuted Jews or have often stood on the side of the persecutors;
- 4) Acknowledgment that disobedience before God has in various ways marked not only Jews, as often assumed by Christians, but also Christians themselves, and that therefore both "can live only by the forgiveness of sin, and by God's mercy";

* For a complete text of the Bristol statement see, The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People (Geneva, 1988)

- 5) Recognition that Christians honestly disagree among themselves regarding "the continued election of the Jewish people alongside the Church" and also regarding the nature of Christian witness to Jews, whereas arrogance, paternalism, and coercive proselytism are rejected by common agreement;
- 6) Recommendation that misconceptions of Jewish teaching and practices in Christian instruction, preaching, and prayers or anything that may foster prejudice and discrimination against Jews, should be properly corrected.

Although the Bristol report's call for the renewal of Christian thinking on Judaism did not receive wide attention within the WCC, constructive work continued during the 1970's through the Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People (CCJP), resulting in the "Ecumenical Considerations on Jewish-Christian Dialogue", a document received and commended for study and action by the Executive Committee of the WCC (1982). These "Ecumenical Considerations" pointed out that the Church, in the process of defining its own theological identity, traditionally assigned to Judaism negative roles and images in the history of salvation by teaching:

- 1) the abrogation of the Sinai Covenant;
- 2) the replacement of Israel as God's people by the Church;
- 3) the destruction of the Temple as proof of divine rejection of the Jewish people;
- 4) and that ongoing Judaism is a fossilized religion of legalism.

The "Ecumenical Considerations" urged a renewed study of Judaism in historical context and appreciation of the fact that Rabbinic Judaism, the Mishnah, and the Talmud have given the

Jewish people spiritual power and structures for creative life through the centuries. While recognizing the diversity and difference between Jews and Christians, as well as among themselves, the "Ecumenical Considerations" also pointed out basic commonalities rooted in biblical revelation and called upon Christians: (1) to see that "for Judaism the survival of the Jewish people is inseparable from its obedience to God and God's covenant" and (2) to learn "so to preach and teach the Gospel as to make sure that it cannot be used towards contempt for Judaism and against the Jewish people."

It is important also to note the position of Vatican II (1963-65) regarding other living faiths, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Judaism, on the basis of the solidarity of humankind under God for the purpose of fostering unity and love among all people. With respect to the Jewish people, Vatican II stated that "the Jews still remain dear to God because of their fathers, for He does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the call He issues (cf. Rom. 11:28-29)", thus affirming the theological value of the witness of Judaism. The "Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing Nostra Aetate" (1974) also pointed out that the question of Jewish-Christian relations is intrinsic to the Church's own self-definition, since in "pondering its own mystery" the Church encounters the "mystery of Israel". While Vatican II held that "the Church is the new people of God" it also clearly rejected the notion that "the Jews should...be presented as repudiated or cursed by God, as if such views followed from the Holy Scriptures."

* Twenty of these official statements and theological commentary on them may be found in The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People (Geneva, 1988)

Vatican II expressed gratitude for the Church's spiritual heritage received from and shared with Jews. Furthermore, Vatican II condemned all "displays of antisemitism and admonished that:

all should take pains, lest in catechetical instruction and in the preaching of God's word they teach anything out of harmony with the truth of the gospel and the spirit of Christ.

In recent times, a number of member churches of the WCC and/or church conferences to which they belong, following a similar direction, have issued separate official statements dealing with such topics as (1) antisemitism and the Shoah (Holocaust), (2) covenant and election, (3) the land and State of Israel, (4) the Scripture, (5) Jesus and Torah, (6) mission, and (7) common responsibilities of Jews and Christians. When examined in their totality, these statements significantly advance the Christian understanding of Judaism and Jewish-Christian relations on the basis of key points:

- 1) that the covenant of God with the Jewish people remains valid;
- 2) that antisemitism and all forms of the teaching of contempt for Judaism are to be repudiated;
- 3) that the living tradition is a gift of God;
- 4) that coercive proselytism directed toward Jews is incompatible with Christian faith;
- 5) that Jews and Christians bear a common responsibility as witness to God's righteousness and peace in the world.*

The churches still struggle with the issue of the continuing role of Jesus and the mission of the Church in relation to the Jewish people and with the question of the relation between

the Covenant and the Land, especially in regard to the State of Israel. We need also to give attention to the self-understanding of those Jews who declare their faith in Jesus as messiah, yet consider themselves as remaining Jewish.

C. Affirmations

In the light of the growth of the Christian understanding of Judaism in the past several decades, we welcome the new appreciation of the faith and life of the Jewish people. We as Christians firmly hold to our confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and God (Jn. 20:28), in the creative, redemptive, and sanctifying work of the triune God, and in the universal proclamation of the gospel. We therefore feel free in Christ to make the following affirmations:

- 1) We believe that God is the God of all people, yet God called Israel to be a blessing to all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:3) and a light to the nations (Is. 42:6). In God's love for the Jewish people, confirmed in Jesus Christ, God's love for all humanity is shown.
- 2) We give thanks to God for the spiritual treasures we share with the Jewish people; faith in the living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex. 3:165); knowledge of the name of God and of the commandments; the prophetic proclamation of judgment and grace; the Hebrew Scriptures; and the hope of the coming kingdom. In all these we find common roots in biblical revelation and see spiritual ties that bind us to the Jewish people.
- 3) We recognize that Jesus Christ both binds together and divides us as Christians and Jews. As a

Jew, Jesus in his ministry addressed himself primarily to Jews, affirmed the divine authority of the Scriptures and the worship of the Jewish people, and thus showed solidarity with his own people. He came to fulfil, not to abrogate, the Jewish life of faith based on the Torah and the Prophets (Mt. 5:17). Yet Jesus, by his proclamation of the dawn of the eschatological kingdom, call of disciples, interpretation of the Law, messianic claims, and above all his death and resurrection, inaugurated a renewal of the covenant resulting in the new movement of the early Church, which in important ways proved also discontinuous with Judaism.

- 4) We affirm that, in the words of Vatican II, "what happened in his (Jesus') passion cannot be blamed on all the Jews then living, without distinction, nor upon the Jews of today" (Nostra Aetate IV.4). We reject, as contrary to the will of God, the view that the sufferings of Jews in history are due to any corporate complicity in the death of Christ.
- 5) We acknowledge that the saving work of Christ gave birth to a new community of faith within the Jewish community, a fact that eventually led to tensions and polemics over the issues of the manner of incorporation of gentiles into the elect people of God and the role of the Mosaic Law as a criterion for salvation (Acts 15:1). The majority of Jews, in their understanding of Torah, did not accept the apostolic proclamation of the risen Christ. The early Christians, too, regarded themselves as faithful Jews, but in their understanding of the

eschatological events, opened the doors to the gentiles. Thereby two communities of faith gradually emerged, sharing the same spiritual roots, yet making very different claims. Increasingly, their relations were embittered by mutual hostility and polemics.

6) We deeply regret that, contrary to the spirit of Christ, many Christians have used the claims of faith as weapons against the Jewish people, culminating in the Shoah, and we confess sins of word and deed against Jews through the centuries. Although not all Christians in all times and all lands have been guilty of persecution of Jews, we recognize that in the Christian tradition and its use of Scripture and liturgy there are still ideas and attitudes toward Judaism and Jews that consciously or unconsciously translate into prejudice and discrimination against Jews.

7) We acknowledge with the apostle Paul that the Jewish people have by no means been rejected by God (Rom. 11:1,11). Even after Christ, "they are (present tense) the Israelites, and to them belong (present tense) the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the worship, and the promises" (Rom. 9:4). In God's design, their unbelief in Christ had the positive purpose of the salvation of gentiles until, in God's good time and wisdom, God will have mercy on all (Rom. 11:11, 25,26,32). Gentile Christians, engrafted as wild olive shoots on the tree of the spiritual heritage of Israel, are therefore admonished not to be boastful or self-righteous toward Jews but rather to stand

in awe before the mystery of God (Rom. 11:18,20,25,33).

8) We rejoice in the continuing existence and vocation of the Jewish people, despite attempts to eradicate them, as a sign of God's love and faithfulness towards them. This fact does not call into question the uniqueness of Christ and the truth of the Christian faith. We see not one covenant displacing another, but two communities of faith, each called into existence by God, each holding to its respective gifts from God, and each accountable to God.

9) We affirm that the Jewish people today are in continuation with biblical Israel and are thankful for the vitality of Jewish faith and thought. We see Jews and Christians, together with all people of living faiths, as God's partners, working in mutual respect and cooperation for justice, peace, and reconciliation.

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A Newsmen in Divinity School

Ari L. Goldman

(Ari L. Goldman, a reporter covering religion for The New York Times, wrote the following article in November 1987 after enrolling at Harvard Divinity School and attending classes conducted by Dr. Diana Eck, the Moderator of the Dialogue Working Group.)

In the first days of the 1985-86 school year at Harvard, the course called "World Religions, Diversity and Dialogue" was so popular that all the seats were taken and some students were sitting cross-legged on the floor of a great lecture hall. With two hands, the professor pushed her blonde hair behind her ears and made a statement that was to reverberate in my mind for the rest of the school year: "If you know one religion", she said slowly, looking at us with intensity, "you don't know any."

The comment was so powerful for me because it broke down one of my basic assumptions. I had always felt that my involvement with my own faith, Judaism, was enough to enable me to understand Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism. After all, I know what it was like to go to synagogue, so I assumed that I knew just what a Christian felt in church or a Moslem felt in a mosque.

It was just one of many preconceptions that would crumble in the extraordinary year I spent as a student at Harvard Divinity School, the nation's most prestigious Christian school of theology that is a training ground for Protestant ministers. I was neither a Christian nor a candidate for the ministry, but I found myself there on an unusual leave of absence from my job as a religion writer for The New York Times.

The idea was that, at the age of 35,

after a decade of daily journalism, I would go to Harvard for a dispassionate encounter with Christianity and the religions of the East and then return to my beat to write about religion with greater knowledge and authority. At Harvard Divinity, however, I learned that there was little dispassionate about the study of religion. From my first day at the "Div School", as it was known familiarly on campus, I felt emotionally engaged and spiritually challenged.

At first, I tried to resist. In those opening days of school, I carried a small reporter's notebook, ostensibly as a way to record the experience, but more importantly to try to retain the aura of a detached observer so well honed as a newspaper reporter. But soon, I put the notebook aside and let myself go, delving into the New Testament, the Koran and the Upanishads.

No, I did not convert. My Jewish identity, cultivated through a warm Orthodox upbringing and an intensive yeshiva education, never really came under siege. But what did happen was an extraordinary dialogue, one that began between the religious ideas I encountered and the Jewish ideas within myself. The dialogue continued every day in the classroom, in Buddhist meditation, in Christian prayer, in Moslem poetry and in fellowship around my own Sabbath table, around which I assembled people of various faiths.

As a result of these encounters, I

learned how others experience their faith. In short, I learned that the professor was right on that first day: If you know one religion, you don't know any. Or to put it another way: If you know many religions, you can begin to understand your own.

What happened at Harvard was that I learned not only about others, but about myself. My Judaism was enriched and broadened in, of all places, a Christian divinity school. For a time, in fact, I seriously considered becoming a rabbi. The seed of the idea began to be an obsession that kept me awake nights thinking, "What is it that is really important in life?"

The neighbor was a retired career Army officer in his 60's with the unlikely name of Bill Doe. He lived next door to the house we rented on Chester Street in Somerville, about a mile from the school. Bill, who spent most of the day on his stoop smoking cigars and swapping stories with passers-by, was the unofficial mayor of Chester Street. On the day I moved in with my wife, Shira, and our infant son, Adam, he arrived to introduce himself. I told him my name and that I was from New York and a new student at Harvard Divinity School.

A few days later, as I walked home from school, Bill, engaged in conversation with another neighbor, waved and called in a booming voice, "Hello, Rabbi!" I went over to explain that I was not a rabbi, just a student of religion, but he was already introducing me. "Rabbi, I would like you to meet the Judge." The Judge was a small man, long retired from the bench, who also smoked cigars.

I smiled politely, shook hands and excused myself, thinking, "I guess there isn't much harm in him thinking I'm a rabbi." Besides, I thought later, maybe that is what I should be

doing with my life - finish this year at the Div School, quit the newspaper business and enroll in a rabbinical seminary. Maybe being a rabbi was my true calling.

I was especially susceptible to the idea of becoming a rabbi because I was surrounded at school by people studying for the ministry. These were different from the caricature of the self-centered, upwardly mobile, competitive student of today. At the Div School, there were men and women interested in serving God and society in an age when many seemed to serve themselves.

In a refreshing way, attending Harvard Divinity was a throwback to my student days of the late 1960's, when questions like "What are you going to do for society?" and "What are you doing tonight?" seemed so much more pressing than "How are you going to make a living?"

At the Div School, hair was worn a little longer than at Harvard's other schools. The jeans tended to be torn and faded rather than designer.

From 1967 to 1971 I attend Yeshiva College in Manhattan, the men's undergraduate school of Yeshiva University. The rebellion, excitement and turmoil of the times had not escaped my conservative college. After all, we were only a few subway stops from Columbia, the epicenter of student rebellion in 1968. We felt the shock waves and sensed the liberation it helped spread.

Back in school in the 80's, I found the Div School and its values familiar and comforting. It was, however, no place to study to be a rabbi.

Harvard was founded 351 years ago as a training ground for Puritan ministers. The divinity school was spun off as a separate theological school in 1816, becoming, after Harvard Medical School,

the university's second professional school.

During the 19th century the divinity school maintained an affiliation with the Unitarian church and served as a principal training ground for its church leaders. In the early 1900's it severed its denominational ties and began training ministers for all Protestant churches.

The Div School does not ordain anyone, however. It trains students in theology and the Scriptures and then sends them back to their particular churches to be ordained. Over the years, the school has developed a strong department for the teaching of world religions. All candidates for the Christian ministry must take one course in world religions in each year of the three-year program. The Div School faculty is as much known for its Islamicists and Hindu scholars as its Christian theologians.

Much of this background is in the Div School catalogue, which conjures up the image of a devout and serious, if not celibate, student body, determined to shape the future of the American Protestant church. At least, that is what my wife and I thought until we arrived at the orientation party during the first week of the classes.

The event sounded serious, even though it was billed as a dance, so we split the difference and wore khaki and tweed. Anticipating an evening of hymns and mulled cider, we told the baby sitter we'd be home early.

What we encountered at the Div School dance was piked hair, fishnet stockings, short skirts and couples, both heterosexual and homosexual, dancing to U-2 and Michael Jackson. We called the baby sitter and told her we'd be late.

Over the next few months, I was to get

to know my fellow students and their stories. There was Meg - the one with the fishnet stockings - who had given up her job as a buyer at Lord & Taylor to become a Unitarian minister. And there was Justin, a 23-year-old Midwesterner from a family of 10 children, a Roman Catholic with a girlfriend, who flirted with the idea of becoming a celibate priest. There was Robert, a middle-aged banker who decided to devote his life to God after he saw his bank go under and his wife become an alcoholic. There was Julia, a clean-cut suburban type from Cleveland who was a leader in the school's Lesbian and Gay Caucus. And there was Soho, a Buddhist monk from Japan who brought his search for Nirvana to Harvard.

They were a diverse group. But, in keeping with my professor's admonition, if I knew them all, I could begin to understand myself.

The professor who spun this wisdom, Diana Eck, was a Christian from Montana and a Hindu scholar who held a joint appointment at Harvard College and the Div School. Her class in world religions, held in Emerson Hall, on the main campus, was popular in both schools.

She worked hard at her lectures, she once admitted to staying up until the wee hours of the morning rewriting them. And she expected her students to work hard as well. The syllabus warned of a mid-term, final, term paper and reading list of 10 weighty books.

The books included "What the Buddha Taught", by Walpola Rahula, "Ideals and Realities of Islam", by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Between Time and Eternity", by Jacob Neusner, and "Honest to God", by John A.T. Robinson. But maybe the book on the list that summed up the course the best was by Mohandas K. Gandhi. It was

called "All Religions are True".

While the class was crowded for the first few lectures - during a time known as the "shopping period", when Harvard students may decide what courses they finally take - it thinned out somewhat when the requirements were spelled out. In the end, 151 students, two-thirds from the college and the rest from the Div School, stuck with Professor Eck.

Her first task was to banish some misconceptions. On the blackboard, she chalked the names of the five faiths we were to study and asked us to estimate the percentage of world population each religion represented.

"Hindus, what do I hear for Hindus?" she cried out like a carnival barker. "Five percent", said one voice. "No, no", said another. "Think of all those people in India. Thirty percent.

"Jews, what do I hear for Jews?" she called out. "Ten percent", called out one student. "No, too high", responded another. "It's more like 3 percent."

It went on like this for a while, with Professor Eck at the blackboard recording the guesses. Then she wrote the real numbers, which surprised more than a few people, including myself: Christian, 32.4 percent, Moslem, 17.1, Hindu, 13.5, Buddhist, 6.2, Jewish, 0.4.

Diana Eck was an enchanting teacher. In her early 40's, unmarried and pretty, she had the habit of pulling her hair behind her ears so her simple gold earrings would show. In the winter, she favored turtleneck sweaters and oversized sport jackets. She was also enigmatic. Though she came across very warmly, almost seductively, from the lectern, many students reported that she was standoffish when they approached her after class. Early in the semester, Shira good-naturedly

teased me about having a crush on this professor of world religions.

There was another teacher I met in the first few days of the fall semester whom I undoubtedly had a crush on. His name was Louis Jacobs, a scholar from England who was at Harvard Divinity for the year as the visiting List Professor in Jewish Studies. He was short, a bit overweight, with a white goatee and large bags under his eyes.

Rabbi Jacobs, the descendant of an illustrious family of European rabbis, fast became one of the most popular professors at this elitist Protestant divinity school. Quickly he became known as "the rabbi", as in "Have you heard the rabbi?" "You must sit in on the rabbi's class." "The rabbi is a storyteller." All this was overheard in the cafeteria and the hallways.

The administration, bemused by the rabbi's popularity, had inadvertently assigned small seminar rooms for his classes. All the chairs around the table were quickly filled, latecomers would steal chairs from less popular neighboring classes, or merely sit on the floor.

For everyone else, Louis Jacobs was a window into Judaism, for me, an insider, he parted the curtains and let the sun shine in.

The Orthodox Judaism I grew up with was warm, embracing and, at the same time, curiously intellectual, with much emphasis on the complicated legal arguments of the Talmud. It was an intellectualism, though, with its own set of rules that made perfect sense in the rabbinic context but would not bear the scrutiny of mathematics or science. When faced with the weaknesses of their system, the rabbis would resort to fanciful explanations or simply fall back on faith.

Tay-ku. It sounds like the name of a Japanese restaurant, but it is the Talmudic formula for questions that had no answers. Tay-ku essentially means, have faith, some day the Messiah will come and answer the seemingly unanswerable. I was comfortable in accepting the Tay-kus of Judaism. Then I met Louis Jacobs.

Rabbi Jacobs was the first pious Jew I met who I felt really wanted answers. And in seeking them, some of the old shibboleths fell, but to my amazement they did not break. Because of his faith, they emerged alive and well and even fortified.

In one class, Rabbi Jacobs tackled the tricky question of who wrote the Hebrew Bible. The Orthodox tenet I grew up with was that the Torah was written by God on Mount Sinai and given to Moses. On an intellectual and historical level, I knew this scenario was unlikely, but on an emotional level I somehow needed to believe it was true.

In class, Rabbi Jacobs offered a full range of views, from the Orthodox to the scholarly, and demonstrated the weaknesses and strengths of each. In the end, he favored the theory of four different authors living at different times. This, he said, was obvious from different writing styles, inconsistencies in the texts and the development of Jewish law through antiquity.

After class, I walked Rabbi Jacobs home and told him what troubled me. "Once you punch holes in it", I asked him, "and reveal that it is not all God-given, what happens to your faith? What is your Judaism?"

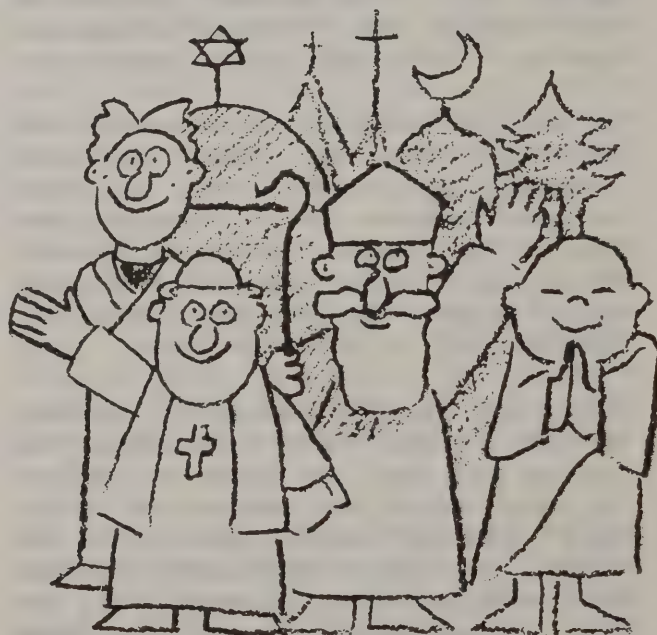
He pointed to a beautiful tree on the school lawn. "Do you know how that tree began?" he asked. He bent down and picked up an acorn and rolled it in his fingers. "Just because you know how it began doesn't mean you

cannot enjoy the tree." I relaxed in its shade and gave it all some thought.

Is the Torah divine? An affirmative answer is easy if you know one religion. But if you know many, the questions multiply and chase each other in a wild circle. Is the New Testament divine? Is the Koran? And if they are, what about the Torah?

Or, is it possible that none of the holy books are God-given? Maybe they simply represent man's striving to understand and ultimately reach the divine.

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SEVENTEEN PROMISES FOR ENTERING IN THE DIALOGUE WITH PEOPLE OF LIVING FAITHS AND PRACTISING RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Ans J. Van der Bent

I. Two decades ago an ecumenical consultation at Kandy, Sri Lanka, in 1967, expressed the conviction that "as our dialogue with people of other faiths develops, we may gain light regarding the place held by other religious traditions in God's purposes for them and for us, this is a question which cannot be answered a priori or academically, but must continue to engage our earnest study and reflection... True dialogue is a progressive and cumulative process, which takes place not only through verbal communication, but through the dynamic contact of life with life... Nothing less than living in dialogue is the responsibility and privilege to which we are called."

II. "Clearly we are only at the beginning of exploring a new dimension and possibility in the Church's life and mission in the world." This was a certainty formulated at an ecumenical consultation held at Zürich, Switzerland in 1970. It continued to say: "We must seek to be as realistic about the dangers as about the promises. Nothing in the Christian faith suggests that there is creativity without risk or newness without suffering. Our hope lies in the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in judgment, mercy and new creation. Christians must surely show great boldness in exploring ways forward to community, communication and communion between people at both the local and the world level."

"... The objective of dialogue is not a superficial consensus or the finding of the greatest common factor. It

aims at the expression of love which alone makes truth creative. Love is always vulnerable. But in love there is no room for fear. Genuine love is mutually transforming. Dialogue thus involves the risk of one partner being changed by the other. The desire for false security in ghetto communities or for continuing in one-way patterns of mission betrays both fear and arrogance and therefore the absence of love."

III. This position was affirmed in "Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies", published by the World Council of Churches in 1979. "To enter into dialogue requires an opening of the mind and heart to others. It is an undertaking which requires risk as well as a deep sense of vocation. It is impossible without sensitivity to the richly varied life of humankind. This opening, this risk, this vocation, this sensitivity are at the heart of the ecumenical movement and in the deepest currents of the life of the churches."

The Guidelines, however, also struck a sober and warning note by stating that Christians "feel sharply conscious of the way in which diversity can be, and too often has been, abused; the temptation to regard one's own community as the best, to attribute to one's own religious and cultural identity an absolute authority, the temptation to exclude from it, and to isolate it from others. In such temptations Christians recognize that they are liable to spurn and despoil the riches which God has, with such generosity,

invested in His human creation... that they are liable to impoverish, divide and despoil."

IV. The history of colonialism has come to an end. During a period of more than three centuries in which European nations ruled over black, brown and yellow populations, it was psychologically inevitable that they should see those whom they dominated as inferior and as in need of a higher guardianship. Although there were individual colonial administrators, who came genuinely to respect the people over whom they ruled, and a number of missionaries, who developed a deep affection for the people they intended to evangelize, more usually their cultures were seen as barbarous and their religions as idolatrous superstitions. The moral validation of the colonial enterprise rested upon the conviction that it was a great civilizing and uplifting mission, one of whose tasks was to draw the unfortunate heathen up into the higher, indeed highest, religion of Christianity. Accordingly the gospel played a vital role in the self-justification of Western imperialism.

V. The Christian attitude toward other religions during the colonial period, even in the 20th century up to the present time, has been the "conservative" exclusivist approach, which finds salvation only in Jesus Christ and little, if any, value elsewhere. This approach was reinforced by dialectical theology during the middle of this century, under the leadership of Karl Barth, which insisted that all religions, including the Christian religion, is but the attempt of a godless and wicked human race to reach up to God.

Only the Christian faith is not a religion because it does not indicate the way to God, but accepts God's coming to the world in Jesus Christ. A comparative study of religions

therefore - including Christianity understood as religion - and inter-faith dialogue is a meaningless enterprise. Christians know beforehand that since all religion is based on sheer human inspiration, it leads nowhere and thus to perdition.

VI. During this century also a "liberal" inclusivist attitude towards other religions developed. The Christian faith was conceived, so to say, as the tip of a pyramid. Its base is made up of "primitive" religions while more "advanced" religions make up the middle. The inclusivist position recognizes the salvific richness of other faiths but then views this richness as the result of Christ's redemptive work and as having to be fulfilled in Christ. Contemporary theologians recognize that world religions do contain partial truth as they are illuminated by the light of the Christian gospel. They speak of Christ "in cognito" among people of other faiths.

The problem of this approach is that it still betrays paternalism and condescension. In the times to come Jews will still be Jews expecting the coming of the Messiah, Muslims professing Muhammad to be greatest prophet of God will remain Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus attached to their long Eastern traditions will still be recognizable as Buddhists and Hindus, Africans will still bear the marks of and be witnesses of their religious heritages, and the Chinese will still be rooted in their ancient soil. They not only continue to seek religious truth but experience ways by which God deals redemptively with different parts of humanity.

VII. The time is now more than ripe to explore possibilities of a pluralistic approach to religions - a move away from insistence on the superiority or finality of Christianity toward a recognition of the independent validity

of other ways. Such a move can be described as the crossing of a theological Rubicon, a move quite new to the churches, even to liberal churches and many contemporary theologians.

It should be anticipated, however, that a pluralistic approach to religions has its pitfalls. The recognition of historical relativity easily leads to the quicksand of historical relativism in which no one is allowed to make "absolute" judgments on anyone else. Given the disjunctions and discontinuities existing between religious traditions, it is also impossible and imperialistic to subsume the religions under universal categories. Pluralism does not allow for a universal system. A pluralistic system would be a contradiction in terms. The incommensurability of ultimate systems is unbridgeable. Pluralism is, therefore, not an ultimate, but an immediate concern. For all religions, including Christianity, what is at stake is their view of their own place in history, and their understanding of God. Christians must come to the conclusion that their history has often been a history of "universal colonialism".

VIII. It is impossible to make the global judgment that any one religious tradition has contributed more good or less evil, or a more favourable balance of good over evil, than the others. As vast complex totalities, the world traditions seem to be more or less on a par with each other. None can be singled out as manifestly superior in promoting the welfare of humanity. From the definition of salvation as the divine pardon bought by Christ's atoning death does not follow that Christianity, as Christ's continuing agency on earth, has been engaged in a better human performance than other religions. The paradox remains that it is impossible to know of universal salvation without some

absolute principle of certainty, and that it is impossible to have universal salvation once such an absolute principle is adopted.

Confronting today the intolerable evils that humans inflict on other humans - and many such evils are imposed or sanctioned by religion - believers are called to be so grounded in truth that they can speak and defend as absolutely unacceptable such intolerable evils. Since every religious claim is, however, relative, a wrestling with the dilemma of how to put together the relativity of religious pluralism with the commitment of prophetic praxis is at issue. To view christology and gospel in relation to other manifestations of grace is to hold on with infinite passion to both ends of the dialectic of religious relativity and absoluteness.

IX. As the means of religious perception are historically relative, and, even more important, the object or content of authentic religious experience is infinite, Mystery beyond all forms exceeds every grasp of it. The infinity and ineffability of God demands religious pluralism and forbids any one religion from having the "only" or "final" word. Also Christians have given in to the temptation to equate their religion with God by making it absolute or final. To repent of this idolatry is to cease all exclusive or inclusive claims and to be open to the possible equality of other ways.

The Ultimate Mystery is as ineffable as it is real. All religions can participate in and reflect this Mystery. None can own it. The Ultimate is not only ineluctably ineffable, it is also radically pluralistic. So, too, is all reality. Through the incarnation in Jesus Christ, God has relativized His self in history. If salvation comes from

God - and for Christians it cannot be otherwise - then possibilities should be left open to recognize the validity of other experiences of salvation. A theocentric (or Mystery-centered) christology is not a new fashion. The Bible continually emphasizes the priority of God, and Jesus himself was theocentric. The absolutizing of the doctrine of Jesus Christ whom God has relativized in history cannot be justified.

In moving beyond exclusiveness and inclusiveness, Christians must come to a clearer grasp of the uniqueness of Jesus. The distinctiveness of Jesus Christ does not lie in claiming that "Jesus Christ" is God. This amounts to saying that Jesus Christ is the tribal god of Christians over against the gods of other peoples. Elevating Jesus to the status of god or limiting Christ to the Jesus of Nazareth are both temptations to be avoided. The former runs the risk of an impoverished "Jesuology" and the latter of becoming a narrow "Christomonism". A theocentric christology bypasses these pitfalls and becomes more helpful in establishing new relationships with neighbours of other faiths.

X. All religions, not just Christianity, need a "theology of liberation". They all should accept a shared concern for justice as the starting point and guiding norm for their efforts at dialogue. Although there is a variety of ways for understanding "justice" or "salvation" or "human welfare", a "preferential option" for those most in need might well serve as the context for a true meeting of religions. Persons of different religious traditions could enter a shared liberative praxis for the poor and the suffering, as well as a shared reflection on how that praxis relates to their religious beliefs. This would provide them with a workable means of better understanding and judging each other. Praxis and commit-

ment would further lead to doctrinal clarification and revision.

XI. The ecumenical movement makes only sense in the multi-religious, multi-cultural and multi-ideological world when it is ever newly surprised by the criterion of separation into two groups in the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46). There are not only righteous among those who have confessed Christ's name and belong to his church but equally among those who have no consciousness of ever having served the Lord. By the very spontaneity and unselfconsciousness of their love and their perseverance in well-doing, the righteous among all nations have proved themselves true sons and daughters of their heavenly Father.

Many of those who pretended to know God and to have served him are cursed and not permitted to enter the kingdom. At the last day, Jesus Christ acknowledges as his own people in all the world who have not known him but who have, without being aware of it, served him in the person of their suffering neighbour. It is Christ alone who determines who was a champion of justice by serving others and who shied away from political contamination in order to be served by others. This Christ is neither owned by the Christian religion nor does he contradict or condemn other religions.

XII. From this follows that God is participant not only in Jewish and Christian history but also in Hindu, Buddhist and other histories. The word "participant" should be stressed because it is inadequate to affirm God's providential surveillance of all human history. It is a matter of God's active involvement in peoples' histories, and it is a matter of these being multiple and different.

If there is a "salvation history" delineated and forecast in Christian scripture, then there are other

"salvation histories" outside it, and in them God has different names, different identities, and moves in different ways. Inasmuch as God has different histories, he has different "natures". In pluralist perspective, it is not simply that God has one nature variously and inadequately expressed by different religious traditions. It is that there are real and genuine differences within the Godhead itself, owing to the manifold involvements that God has undertaken with the great variety of human communities.

Mahatma Gandhi called the God of Christians an unperceptive and stingy God. It is incredible that God showed himself only once in Jesus Christ, only once to one people in one place. Gandhi challenged the church not to make a laughing-stock of its faith. If its standards are lower than those of other communities, it renders its beliefs rather ridiculous. The answer to the critical observation of the man who in his own life put more into practice the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount than most Christians is that a great number of baptized members of the Christian churches are in need of even more forgiveness and redemption.

XII. A new reading of the Bible confirms that people shall indeed come from the East and the West and sit down in the kingdom of God (Matthew 8:11), without first becoming "Christians". God's "universalist" light will be upon all his peoples. The author of Revelation goes far beyond the aspirations of "Zionism". He is no longer concerned about the eschatological pilgrimage of the nations to the holy hill and its temple as described in Zechariah 14. The nations will bring into the city their splendour and wealth and the leaves of the trees will serve for their healing (Revelation 21:23-26, 22:2).

These texts set question marks against theologies, explicit or implicit, which speak of a single people of God. There is no one single pattern of ultimate salvation. If peoples of other faiths shall enter through the gates of God's city they must have truth in their holy books and validity in their traditions. The unfathomable reality of the Trinity affects human consciousness for its liberation and salvation in various ways within the Indian, the semitic, the Chinese and the African forms of life.

XIII. In the light of what has been formulated in the previous sections, the exclusiveness of Jesus as the bearer of salvation is for churches and Christians their necessary legitimation. His name is the saving name because it invites them to share in the grace and love that are parts of the nature of God himself. But their knowing and experiencing this does not preclude the actuality that the grace and love which Jesus represents for them can be found under the names of other religious traditions.

Rather than pointing to an exclusive text, such as in Acts 4:12, "for there is no other name under heaven granted to human beings, by which we may receive salvation", it might help Christians to think of ways in which the grace and love of God operate in the world without being named at all. The humility and "un-knownness" of Jesus in his earthly life may point to a humility and un-knownness in the activity of God in the contemporary world. Only in this pattern, which for Christians bears the name of Jesus, is there healing and wholeness for the world: only in this way can any of them be saved. There is no other name given under heaven!

XIV. Churches and Christians are nevertheless often in need of being "evangelized" by communities and people of other living faiths, as they

can discover a wider and deeper significance of the Christian message through their own traditions which churches and Christians have forgotten or not yet grasped. Christianity as it has become manifest in established Christian institutions has by no means reached its definitive stature. Only when other religions with different experiences have widely contributed to a new cultural shape of the Christian community, will the contradiction between Jesus Christ, his church and the whole of humanity become challenging and creative. This is also true for the inner cultural growth of communities of other world religions. In the ecumenical movement there is just a beginning of glimpsing that possibilities and implications of cultural diversity must be taken absolutely seriously in the context of the ecumenical activity of God.

When the fact is recognized that culture is the form of religion and religion is the substance of culture, the tasks of mission and evangelism become anew the true Christian obligation and the expression of a joyous affirmation that each culture incorporates at the same time aspects of abundant life and forces of destruction and death, and that Jesus Christ supports, corrects and transcends all cultures. It is the breadth, the length and the depth of the kingdom of God perspective that renders the witness of Christ's liberation acceptable. There is no Christian mission without a dialogue of cultures and only the cultural-dialogical dimension in mission renders the ecumenical movement credible.

XV. Having pondered over the previous fourteen points of arguments and convictions many Christians and churches will still deny their validity and are liable to flee anew into a "Bible-protected" community. It is so easy and safe to quote Jesus' words, "I am the way, I am the truth and I am life,

no one comes to the Father except by me" (John 14:6), and to make this sentence the absolute criterion for mission and dialogue. Interfaith dialogue is, of course, as much a continuous practice of human solidarity and love as a faithful attempt to convert the other to Jesus Christ.

But all what has been said on the previous pages on sharing in the sufferings and hopes of fellow human beings, on common responsibility for the broken world and a joint search for a viable world community of communities goes in one ear and out at the other. Conversion precedes and overshadows the dynamic contact of life with life. A small minority of Christians have ever been engaged in true dialogue and can tell stories of meeting devout fellow human beings in their daily life, having been touched at some crucial moment by the healing power and the reconciling love of Jesus Christ. Even less Christians have experienced the liberating process of debating agonizing problems of science and technology, economics and politics, together with neighbours of other faiths. The obsession of fellow Christians with one way of salvation tends to leave the world to its fate.

XVI. "Unless a Christian can contrive intelligently and spiritually to be a Christian not merely in a Christian society or a secular society but in the world, unless a Muslim can be a Muslim in the world, unless a Buddhist can carve a satisfactory place for himself as a Buddhist in a world in which other intelligent, sensitive and educated men are Christians and Muslims - unless, I say, we can together solve the intellectual and spiritual questions posed by comparative religion, then I do not see how a man is to be a Christian or a Muslim or a Buddhist at all." These words were written by Wilfred Cantwell Smith in 1962.

Even more today this wisdom has become the framework for practicing religious pluralism and functioning as Christ's ambassadors. The one sentence parable of Jesus, "You are the salt of the earth..." (Matthew 5:13) is full of new meaning. A pinch of salt is out of all proportion effective to its amount. Salt alone is useless; it needs to penetrate the nourishment. Beliefs outside the Christian confinement have intrinsic meaning and value. When the salt has given flavour to the food, it totally disappears and cannot be recovered. Overrating its worth has led to converting the whole earth into a saltmine.

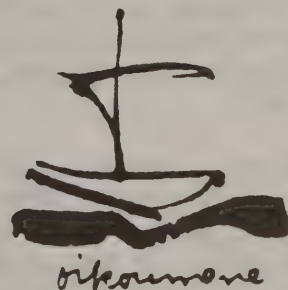
Missionary activities have found their primary justification in the words, "Go, teach baptize..." (Matthew 28:19) - a sentence added to the gospel in the 2nd century. But in many parables Jesus made simple references to gentle, small beginnings of the kingdom. In all his encounters with people he compelled them to come simply out of themselves without any fear or reserve and experience his healing and forgiveness. He did not require a spectacular and convulsive conversion. His people experienced great joy and freedom and lived a new life among their fellow human beings.

XVII. The kingdom of God approaches precisely this world in which it not only makes sense to live as a Jew, a Hindu or a Christian, but in which all believers, and unbelievers, are shaken by the perplexing predicament of humanity. No one religion can promise that it will radically change the course of human history. The forces of evil are overwhelming and there is no end to human agony, disease and suffering. There is no true "glasnost" in the world; on the contrary, it thrives on distorted communication. The threats to the integrity of nature are so great that any policy of ecology seems to come too late and is ineffective.

Indeed, "the whole created universe groans in all its parts as if in the pangs of childbirth" (Romans 8:22).

The interfaith dialogue finds its framework in the prophecy of Isaiah 25:6-8. God will provide at his banquet for abundant life. He will destroy the veil of deceit that is spread over the nations. He will swallow up death for ever and wipe away the tears from all faces. Neighbours of different faith are called to share in the vision of abundant life in the midst of terror and destruction that engulfs the earth. They are called to tear holes in the veil that prevents people from seeing a new heaven and a new earth and from recognizing that it is not only woven out of suffering - it is as much a tissue of prejudices and lies, political, economic and religious. They are called to reject cheap comfort and to wipe away one another's tears, particularly those of millions of children. They are called to proclaim that love is stronger than death and that peace and justice have the last word. Living in dialogue and practicing religious pluralism means to anticipate a world in which it will be easier to love. All are invited to probe even deeper into the Mystery of divine compassion and to become even more accountable for an eternal hope.

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ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Compiled by Dr. John Berthrong

Publications about interfaith dialogue are already numerous and the list grows daily. However, the following books certainly represent a good selection for any interested person. I have tried to choose books and pamphlets which are both sound in their scholarly and theological methods and eminently readable. The bibliography is divided into two parts: General Reference and Individual Titles. I have included a few recent reference books for the overview they give of the contemporary religious world and for the useful additional bibliographies that they provide. I have also tried to select works which are readily available in bookstores and libraries.

GENERAL REFERENCE

Eerdmans' Handbook to the World's Religions (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982) - This joint Anglo-American handbook provides an excellent series of articles on the various living faiths of the world and a series of theological articles on the question of religious pluralism. One very interesting feature is that the articles are written from a number of different theological perspectives - ecumenical and evangelical Christians participated in the production of the work. It also has many, many fine colour illustrations and charts.

Charles J. Adams, ed., A Reader's Guide to the Great Religions, Second Edition (New York: The Free Press, 1977) - This standard reference work gives excellent bibliographical information about all the religions of the world. It should be consulted if the reader is interested in finding out more about the great religions of the world. It can be used to supplement the smaller bibliographies which are often part of the other works listed in this bibliography. This book should provide all the information that the non-specialist will need.

John R. Hinnells, ed., A Handbook of Living Religions (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1984) - A very interesting general treatment of the major living religions of the world. Each article is written by an expert in the field. It also includes information about the liturgies, special ceremonies, rites, etc., of the various religions. It takes a very broad view of religious life, including materials on the new religions and cults. One of the best new books in the field.

Keith Grimm, General Editor, Abingdon Dictionary of Living Religions (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981) - This reference book is arranged as a dictionary. It has short articles on all kinds of religious leaders, theories, doctrines, practices, etc. It has a very, very wide coverage and can be usefully consulted when an accurate definition or identification is needed.

INDIVIDUAL TITLES

My Neighbour's Faith - and Mine, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986) - I must confess that I was part of the editorial committee of the Dialogue sub-unit of the World Council of Churches which produced this study guide. It is the hope of the sub-unit that this little booklet will be used by Christians around the world to help focus their reflections on what it means to live faithfully amidst the various faith traditions of the world. It is written for Christians and it self-consciously uses Christian categories and expressions.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Towards a World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religions (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981) - This is, perhaps, both a seminal and difficult book. Yet it represents the careful reflections of one of the great historians of religions, who is also a minister of the United Church. Difficult but rewarding reading.

Willard G. Oxtoby, editor, Religious Diversity: Essays by Wilfred Cantwell Smith (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976) - Oxtoby has made a careful selection of Professor Smith's articles written over the years. It is a much simpler introduction to the thought of Professor Smith than the book mentioned above. I will highly recommend it for anyone wanting to understand Smith's profound contribution to interfaith dialogue.

Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies, (World Council of Churches, Geneva: 1979) - This is the representative statement for most Protestant and Orthodox people. It is a carefully prepared document, written after almost a decade of consultation. It tries to outline, for Christians involved in dialogue, what dialogue means, and how it should be engaged.

Gavin D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) - Another excellent book by one of our English colleagues. It is a fine presentation of the theological option known as "inclusivism" for interfaith relations. A good overview of this most important Christian response to the new recognition of religious pluralism. The inclusivist approach is probably the majority opinion among modern Christian theologians.

Kenneth Cracknell, Towards a New Relationship: Christians and People of Other Faith (London: Epworth Press, 1986) - A wonderful summary of the reflections of the Interfaith Secretary of the British Council of Churches. Especially sound in terms of biblical scholarship. Fine chapters on the ethics of interfaith encounters and solid work in the important area of the doctrine of Christ, which is so central to interfaith understanding. Both scholarly and full of useful practical information taken from Dr. Cracknell's years of service internationally in interfaith dialogue.

Donald G. Dawe and John B. Carman, editors, Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1978) - This is a collection of essays from a very important consultation of Christian theologians on Christian Faith in a Pluralistic World. It has some extremely fascinating

articles, including ones by Orthodox and Catholic thinkers. It therefore gives, for instance, a United Church person insight into what other communions are thinking about religious diversity.

Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky, C.S.P., eds., Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1981) - The whole question of the Lordship of Jesus is essential to any understanding of religious pluralism. This series of essays is devoted to grappling with the complex question of our confession of Jesus as Christ and our evaluation of other traditions. As with the above book, it is difficult but rewarding reading for the general public.

Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky, C.S.P., eds., Faith Meets Faith (New York and Toronto: Paulist Press, 1981. Mission Trends No. 5) - This is another extremely useful anthology. A wide range of documents and articles are included. They are the private opinions of Christian theologians and the public statements of various churches. It serves as an excellent handbook for contemporary Christian evaluation of religious pluralism.

S.J. Samartha, Courage for Dialogue: Ecumenical Issues in Inter-Religious Relationships (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1981) - Dr. Samartha is an Indian pioneer of interfaith dialogue. For almost a decade he was Director of the Interfaith unit of the World Council of Churches. In that respect there is hardly anyone more competent to speak about the development of dialogue from a Christian perspective. He also provides us with a Third World perspective on interfaith dialogue.

Willard G. Oxtoby, The Meaning of Other Faiths (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983) - This excellent little book is designed for lay readership. It is concise, informative and stimulating. I think that it would also be a useful study document and was written for just that purpose. It is also interesting because it uses a historical analysis of Christian relations with other faith communities.

Clifford G. Hospital, Breakthrough: Insights of the Great Religious Discoverers (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985) - Professor Hospital, of Queen's University, tries to introduce us to the insights of the great religious leaders of the past. The book lets us get inside the faith structure of the various religious traditions of the world. This is a unique approach to help the Christian understand what it means to be a Muslim, a Jew, a Buddhist, a Hindu, etc. A sensitive introduction to the religious pluralism of our global world.

Alan Race, Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in Christian Theology of Religions (London: SCM Press, 1983) - Here is another excellent example of recent English scholarship on the matter of religious pluralism. It combines a historical overview of previous Christian doctrine along with the author's own theological evaluations.

Paul F. Knitter, No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Towards the World Religions (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985) - Knitter's book is really a great deal like the above mentioned book by Alan Race. It begins with an evaluation of our modern pluralistic religious world, and then

moves on to an evaluation of recent Christian theology. He has developed an excellent way of analyzing these developments. And in the last part of the book he suggests a God-centered theology of Christ appropriate to a religiously plural world. I have personally found this to be the best survey of Christian attitudes toward world religions on the market today. I most highly commend it to all interested in these questions.

Harold Coward, Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985) - This is basically a revised version of Coward's book published in India in 1983. It is an extremely useful volume in that it outlines the positions of the other faith communities concerning religious pluralism.

Richard Henry Drummond, Toward a New Age in Christian Theology (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985) - Another outstanding attempt to deal theologically with the fact of our religiously plural world. Very good sections on the biblical base for a theology of religious pluralism. Also excellent material on the implications for mission theory and practice. Careful attention to the mission history of the Church.

Hans Küng, Josef van Ess, Heinrich von Stietencron, and Heinz Bechert, Christianity and the World Religions: Paths to Dialogue with Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, trans. Peter Heinegg (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1986) - This is a book which is almost as big as its list of authors, translator and title indicates. Hans Küng, certainly one of the most famous of contemporary Christian theologians, dialogues with his colleagues about Christian faith and its relations to other religious communities. Fascinating reading, if a bit long. It might have been better to have had the dialogue with people of other faiths themselves, but stimulating nonetheless. Küng tries to show that dialogue is both necessary and difficult. He also refuses to skip over the real theological and historic problems which Christians will have as they enter into the 'wider' ecumenism of interfaith dialogue.

S. Wesley Ariarajah, The Bible and People of Other Faiths (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1985) - This short and very readable book, written by the Director of the WCC interfaith sub-unit, grapples with the question of the biblical witness and dialogue. In non-technical language it tries to show that dialogue itself is compatible with a modern understanding of the Bible. Very useful for Bible study groups.

John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, eds. The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987) - The essays in this book were all presented at a Stellar conference in 1986 and seek to address the issue of Christian responses to religious pluralism. In fact, most of the authors assembled here have been in the forefront of those calling for the creation of new and faithful models for Christian theology in a pluralistic world. There are fine essays featuring feminist and Third World perspectives. Well written but theologically quite sophisticated.

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